

Lesson plan for Nothing by Janne Teller

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One of the themes that *Nothing* deals with is the idea of sacrifice and meaning. The kids want to prove that life is meaningful, and their plan for proving this is by collecting items that are most meaningful to the students. At first, the items seem rather “common,” but as the demands escalate, it seems some are asked to sacrifice more. Or are all sacrifices equal? Write your response to the following questions. Then partner with another student and write their response in the second box.

Question 1: Are all sacrifices equal? If a student gives up his comic book collection and another has to give up her family photos, are both sacrifices “equal”?

Your response: _____

Partner’s response: _____

The kids want things of value to show that life has meaning. What makes something valuable? Is it mass popularity? Irreplaceability? Originality? Monetary value? What criteria would you use to describe value?

Your response: _____

Partner's response: _____

Is it possible that Pierre and the kids are BOTH right? Can it be that society tires to fill us up with pursuits that are meaningless, but that there can be meaning to life once one looks beyond the shallow pursuits of society?

Your response: _____

What is art?

Once the students' collection of meaningful objects is found, there is a great debate over whether the pile of meaning is art or a horrifying display, but "when it (art museum) bid three and a half million dollars for the heap of meaning. Suddenly, everyone knew that the heap of meaning was art, and that only an uninitiated ignoramus could say otherwise."

In your opinion, what makes something art? Is art only found in museums? What criteria would a museum use to select a piece for its museum? Is art realistic? controversial? emotional? factual?

Often there is debate over whether some pieces are art or not. Look for controversial art pieces such as . Check out Angela Singer's art from dissected dead animals, David Cerny's [Shark](#), [The Gates in Central Park](#), John Cage's "4'33" or look for others at <http://matadornetwork.com/nights/urinals-amputations-starvation-silence-controversial-art-crap/> and <http://artculture.com/featured/controversial-art-showcase> for some ideas. Pick one controversial piece of art. Research the piece to learn more about it. Does the author have a message with this piece? Is there meaning to the art, or is it merely a stunt for shock value? What have other critics or people said about it? Does this piece deserve to be in a museum? Why or why not?

ELA Standards

7th grade RP 6: Answer literal, inferential, and evaluative questions to demonstrate comprehension.
7th InfoText 3: Compare and contrast different sources of information to draw conclusions about topic.
7th Writing 2: Responses to novels providing interpretation and support from novel for judgments.
7th Writing 4: Informational essays with specific examples and information from sources.